

# Pre-Service Teacher Training in South Africa: Are Student Teachers Offered Adequate Training About the South African Education System?

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## Abstract

*Pre-service teacher training is a matter of concern. Due to the shortage of teachers, the Minister of Higher Education in South Africa has made an agreement with South African universities to produce between 13 000 and 15 000 teachers per year from 2010 to 2014. A large number of students who pursue teaching profession are financed by the state so that the determined target can be reached. The student teachers are taught methodologies of teaching for primary and secondary schools in different universities in South Africa. It is of the utmost importance that student teachers be taught about the education system, handling of diversity of learners before they start their teaching careers. This conceptual paper would like to address the importance of offering adequate training on students' pre-service teacher training programmes.*

## 1. Introduction

Pre-service Teacher Education is the education and training provided to student teachers before they have undertaken any teaching. Common topics include classroom management, lesson plans, and professional development. A major focus during such education programmes is the practicum where the pre-service teacher is placed within a school setting either at primary or secondary school. The pre-service teacher will be given opportunities to develop skills through lesson plans, teaching lessons and classroom management.

Lesson plans, teaching lessons and class room management are not enough for developing a whole teacher. Pre-service teacher training should include exposure to policy of education, education administration, and structure of teaching, diversity of teachers and learners. These will help to develop the teacher who will be able to handle the diversity of situations that may arise in the working situation.

## 2. Education system

The education system is a structure, consisting of particular components, for effective teaching in order to provide for the educational needs of a specific group of people, namely, the target group in a territory (Steyn, Steyn, de Waal and Wolhuter, 2002:42). Steyn et al (2002:42) further state that scholars such as Holmes, Vos, Brits and Van Schalkwyk state that an education system has details on components such as: objectives, aims, administration, legislation, education control, school system, financing structure and organisation, compulsory education, medium of instruction, curriculum and teacher training, education policy and legislation, organisational structure of education system, managerial and administrative structures, education institutions, and support services. Amongst these mentioned components, this paper will consider education system policy, education system administration, teaching structure and support services. These components help teachers to know what kind of education system they are going to find themselves in, in terms of its policies, how it is structured, and the kind of curriculum that is offered for the target group.

### 2.1 Policy (ies)

It is necessary for pre-service teacher training to offer its students knowledge and understanding of legislations and policies that regulate education system. The knowledge of the policies will assist them in contributing towards implementation as teachers are regarded as implementation agents. South African education since 1994 has transformed and several legislations in education have been promulgated. Some significant legislations are what Roos, Oosthuizen and Smit (2009:60) call 'parliamentary education legislations'. These refers to parliamentary laws that are promulgated for education.

In South Africa, basic education is one of the functional areas of concurrent national and provincial legislative competence listed in Schedule 4 of the Constitution. Examples of education legislation include the following:

### **The National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996.**

Section 2 of the National Education Policy Act is significant for the following reasons:

- To empower the national Minister of Education to determine national education policy in terms of certain principles.
- To provide an infrastructure which requires consultation with a wide variety of bodies.

Section 5 of the Act has got examples of these bodies. Bodies such as representative of the organized teaching profession, a national council of college rectors, a national council representative of students and a national council representative of parents.

- To ensure the publication and implementation of the national education policy.
- To ensure the evaluation and monitoring of education in South Africa.

### **The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA)**

The preamble to the Schools Act says that the Act wants to devise uniform norms and standards for the education of learners in South Africa and to build an education system that does not discriminate against anyone. It also contains the most important provisions for the restructuring, governance and management of public schools; the establishment, registration and subsidizing of independent schools as well as conditions for home schooling.

Other essential principles of SASA are:

- Eliminating poverty through proper education;
- Establishing a human rights culture to advance the democratic transformation of society;
- Ensuring respect for and protection and advancement of various cultures and languages; and
- Establishing a partnership between all stakeholders who have an interest in education, i.e. the state, parents, learners, educators and other members of the community in the vicinity of a school (Joubert&Prinsloo, 2008:25).

### **Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998**

In this Act special attention is given to following aspects regarding the service dispensation of educators:

- Regulations regarding educators service conditions.
- Regulations regarding their appointment, promotion and transfer.
- Regulations regarding the termination of their services.
- Descriptions of the terms ‘misconduct’ and ‘incapacity’; and also an exposition of educators accused of these transgressions.

### **South African Council of Educators Act 31 of 2000**

South African Council of Educators Act contains provisions on the composition of the Council, disciplinary procedures that may be taken by the Council, the Code of Professional Ethics, as well as fees payable to the Council.

Besides parliamentary education legislation, there is a substantial body of general (non-education) legislation of which the educator must take note of. The legislations such as:

### **Copyright Act 98 of 1978**

Van Wyk as quoted by Rooset, al.(2009:80) summarises the implications of this Act for education as follows:

- Only a reasonable number of pages may be copied for one’s own use. Essentially this means that approximately 10% of the content of a book and up to one article per periodical may be copied.
- An educator may recover only actual disbursements and may make no profit from copies distributed to learners.
- A work may not habitually copied in the above manner.

## 2.2 Education system administration

The component of education system administration indicates the administration structure (control) through which the functionaries and personnel in the education system are organised, as well as the work by means of which the education system functions (education management). Through education administration the education policy is, on the one hand, determined and on the other hand it is ensured that the policy is implemented (Steyn et al., 2002:69). Additional insight into how education is being administered should be a common knowledge to teachers who are still undergoing training.

Teachers must know channels of communication from school level to national level, that is an understanding of the hierarchy. The hierarchical structure usually comprises top, middle and lower level managerial and teaching posts. In addition, particular attention must be given to the maintaining of effective communication among different posts/positions.

The workload of every functionary in the school should, in terms of their authority and responsibility, be reasonable and manageable so that effective teaching in the school is possible.

## 2.3 Structure for teaching

When describing the structure of educational programmes it is necessary to refer to the ways in which different curricula/education (training) programmes and education institutions in the education system are organized into a unit with the aim of providing for the differential needs of the learners (target group). The following aspects must also be included in the structure of education: education (training) levels, education (training) institutions, curricula and differentiation, entrance requirements as well as evaluation and certification (Steyn et al., 2002:76). Amongst the aspects which are included in the structure of teaching, this paper will consider curricula and differentiation as it is the core business of the teacher in curriculum delivery.

### Curricula and differentiation

Curricula represent the different courses or education programme by means of which the educational needs of the target group are met. The following are differentiation possibilities for education/training programmes:

- Individual differentiation: as far as possible, every individual should be given the opportunity to develop according to his own cognitive and physical abilities, as well as his own individual potential and interest in his chosen career.
- Cultural differentiation: education has to recognize cultural differences such as, language.
- Life view differentiation: the structure for education should make provision for the different philosophies of life because the nature of education is definitely determined by one's view of life (Steyn et al., 2002:79).

Teachers who have insight about curricula and differentiation as aspect of the structure of teaching in the education system can make meaningful contribution if the features mentioned above are organised.

## 3. Diversity

As education system is a structure for effective teaching to meet the needs of the target group. This target group in any education system has got its own diversity which pre-service training should consider when training up and coming teachers. Diversity among target groups might be caused by culture, gender and socio-economic backgrounds.

According to Meier, van Wyk and Lemmer (2007:163) diversity applies not only to groups that are differentiated by such factors as ethnicity, race, language and religion, which leads to multiculturalism, but also individuals may differ from each other in important ways due to group classification. The South African population is one of the most heterogeneous in the world, being characterized by racial, ethnic and cultural diversity (Pretorius, 2010:118). Diversity constitutes any kind of variety, including sexual orientation, disability, learning preferences, nationality, and education level; pre-service teacher training should consider some of these aspects. Diversity will be discussed under the following sub-topics:

- **Culture**

Goodman and Marx as quoted by Meir et.al. (2007:163) define culture as a learned, socially transmitted heritage of artefacts, knowledge, beliefs and normative expectations that provides the members of a particular society with tools for coping with recurrent problems. Culture can be viewed as a composite of significant and interrelated factors, all of which have significance for the teaching and learning process. Thus features of culture can be summarized as:

- processes of social and human interactions;
- embracing a body of knowledge;
- being a dynamic, creative and continuous processes;
- being created by people;
- changing continuously over time;
- having its own system of values, beliefs, norms and attitudes;
- having material artefacts;
- having unique verbal and non-verbal patterns of communication;
- shared and learnt; and
- influencing the way people think, feel and believe (Meir et, al., 2007:163).

It is therefore necessary for pre-service teacher training to offer teachers an understanding of what culture is all about and how teachers who are teaching learners from diverse cultures can handle themulticulturalism concept.

### **Multiculturalism in education**

Many schools throughout the world reflect the multicultural communities that they serve and they have had to devise ways of responding to these realities. According to Bilgrami (2010:199) and Guangbo (2010:1) multiculturalism is a term which is used to describe the social condition of diversity among the population evident through various spatial formations, but particularly seen through the lens of nations, states and cities.

### **Characteristics of multicultural education**

According to Lemmer, Meir and van Wyk (2006:4) a multicultural education is not a single educational course or programme but rather a multiplicity of programmes and practices. It can also have different meanings for different schools and groups of people, according to the needs and circumstances. Multicultural education:

- Recognizes and accepts the rightful existence of different cultural groups;
- Encourages acculturation and cultural preservation;
- Encourages mutual interaction and cooperation;
- Views cultural diversity as an asset rather than a disability;
- Acknowledges the equal rights of all cultural groups in society;
- Advocates equal educational opportunities;
- Encompasses many dimensions of human differences;
- Requires the reform of the total school environment;
- Is an approach to education and should therefore permeate the entire teaching and learning process; and
- Is synonymous with effective teaching.

- **Socio-economic diversity**

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (1997:143) in South and southern Africa, as in most other post-colonial societies, poverty has to do with a history of power relationships which have disadvantaged particular groups in the society. Even when these power relationships change, the process of changing the economic realities of the daily living for the poorest of the poor may take a very long time.

In a meeting in Lady Frere in the Eastern Cape Province, community member raised this concern: “We have a problem. The government says education is equal for blacks and whites but in fact ours lags behind. I blame the government. It has not created equal education for all. Different things are taught in urban and rural areas. That’s where the problem lies....” (Research Report: 3).

In Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, a learner tells her story as follows: “When I wake up in the morning, I fold the blankets and the grass mats and I have a bath. I herd the cattle to the pasture and come back to eat.

Then I get ready for school.....at home I get dressed in my ‘home clothes’, eat, and then fetch the cattle, I then have a bath and sleep” (Research report: 17). These are some of the community members and learners that a teacher who is at pre-service teacher training will come across. Given this background; the question is how pre-service training can guide and prepare the teacher on how to handle such community members and learners.

#### • Gender

Gender stereotypes create contrasting expectations and, therefore, requiring contrasting or differential behaviours towards girls and boys in schools. Gender bias in educators’ expectations of learners effectively prevents them from reaching their full potential. It is therefore important that teachers carefully consider their behavior and attitudes towards learners to determine whether teachers are gender biased (Meier et al. 2006:167). Lesbians and gays might be in classes; they must be accepted by all including teachers as nobody is allowed to discriminate against people’s sexual orientation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Realizing that novice teachers are thrown at the deep end with no induction taking place in schools, makes it necessary for pre-service teacher training in South African universities to offer training which will include the three components mentioned above of South African education system diversity which includes among other things: culture, socio-economic and gender of the learners.

To answer the topic question directly, pre-service teacher training does not offer adequate training for South African education system as in most cases novice teachers get frustrated as they are not trained to cope with different aspects related to policy, administration and curricula and differentiation. Training mainly focuses only on classroom interaction such as lesson plans, teaching lessons and classroom management and not at the holistic picture, or the whole system of education.

The more than six months of teaching practice in schools while they are training, therefore forces them to concentrate on teaching only.

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